

## Internal labyrinth of multi-vector approach

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The end of September was marked with a significant staff change in the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry: President Leonid Kuchma announced his decision to dismiss Foreign Minister Borys Tarasiuk.

So far Borys Tarasiuk's diplomatic career developed positively. An officer at the Ukrainian permanent mission to the UN in New York in 1981-1986, he had a nomenclature period in his career, working as a foreign relations instructor at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine in 1987-1990. His name became well-known in broader political circles in 1991, when he got a job at the Foreign Ministry and dealt with nuclear disarmament issues and new relations with Russia in that context. In December 1994 - September 1995, Borys Tarasiuk occupied the position of First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

His predecessor in the ministerial position Hennady Udovenko once noted that as long ago as in September 1995, when Tarasiuk had been appointed as Ukraine's ambassador to Brussels he should have been prepared to occupy the position of the Foreign Minister (Den, April 18, 1998). When Tarasiuk was finally given the job in 1998, Udovenko announced that the appointment logically contributed to "continuity" of Ukrainian foreign policy (Zerkalo Nedeli, April 18, 1998). By then the policy had already been routinely described as "multi-vector".

Noteworthy, the appointment of Tarasiuk in 1998 had its specific foreign policy details, reflected in the comments of then very active member of the parliament, former Prime Minister Yevhen Marchuk. His statements of that time may contain a clue to the current situation. Among other things, Yevhen Marchuk argued that the appointment of Tarasiuk "could be perceived as controversial by the Russian diplomatic elite." According to Marchuk, "the President made that appointment consciously for <...> he will oversee the Russian vector himself, and the European [vector] will be supervised by Borys Tarasiuk" (Ukraina Moloda, April 21, 1998). It is important to note that since mid-1990s Borys Tarasiuk has enjoyed the image of a steady and active advocate of Ukraine's integration to European institutions and the closest possible cooperation with NATO.

Commenting on his new appointment Borys Tarasiuk then noted that "Western countries are not indifferent now to the fate of Ukraine. Our state is being perceived as an important factor of European politics and [other states'] wish to see it among active participants of European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes" (Uriadovyi Kurrier, April 18, 1998). Further developments and Ukraine's progress (or the lack of it) in joining the above processes did not contradict the Minister's views and foreign policy beliefs.

However, with the time passing by, the declared objectives have not been reached. Nowadays, Ukraine is as distant from the Euro-Atlantic alliance, and probably even more distant from EU accession - notwithstanding visits, concepts and special Charters. Naturally, the Foreign Ministry can't be the only one to blame, though, remarkably, a few months ago a number of representatives of the legislature and the executive would claim or imply that the Foreign Ministry was unable to "secure" the desired international attitude to Ukraine.

A couple of days after Tarasiuk left, on October 2, 2000 President Kuchma signed a decree appointing Anatoly Zlenko as a new Foreign Minister. The appointment surprised many and caused speculations about a possible relapse of the ministry's policy in early 1990s. Anatoly Zlenko occupied the position of Foreign Minister in the last years of Ukraine's Soviet period and the first years of its independent statehood (July 1990 - August 1994). In September 1994 - September 1997, he served as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to France, and Ukraine's Permanent Representative to UNESCO.

However, "the change of the Foreign Minister does not mean the change of the foreign policy course of Ukraine," President Leonid Kuchma announced on April 20, 1998 at the open session of the Collegium of the Foreign Ministry of Ukraine (Uriadovyi Kurrier, April 21, 1998). Then the ministry's top chair passed from Hennady Udovenko- who had received a seat in the parliament in the March 1998 general elections as a member of top five of the Ukrainian People's Movement Rukh's election list - to Borys Tarasiuk, previously Ukraine's ambassador to Benelux and the head of Ukraine's mission at NATO. The President's statement was repeated almost verbatim a few days ago. When formally introducing new Minister Zlenko to his subordinates at the Foreign Ministry, Leonid Kuchma announced that the change of the Foreign Ministry leadership did not, in any way, mean the change in Ukraine's strategic course. "Nobody can have any doubts about that," the President stated, stressing the steadiness of

Ukraine's course towards European integration (Holos Ukrainy, October 4, 2000). Simultaneously he emphasized the need for deeper relations with Russia and argued that it would be "inadmissible" to treat that direction as "secondary" (Uriadovi Kurrier, October 4, 2000). The reason for the traditional "multi-vectorism" is obvious: according to the President, Ukraine should not hope to enter European markets that have already been occupied; instead, efforts should be taken not to lose "those that we have" and take a closer look at the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, the Middle East and other regions of the world.

After all, in accordance with the constitution Ukraine's foreign policy is decided by a self-sufficient Foreign Ministry, but by the President of Ukraine. Article 18 of the Constitution explicitly states that "foreign policy activity of Ukraine aims at providing for its national interests and security by means of maintaining peaceful and mutually beneficial cooperation with members of the international community within the framework of generally recognized principles and norms of international law." According to Article 106 (part 3), the President of Ukraine "represents the state in international relations, supervises the state's foreign policy, conducts negotiations and enters international agreements for Ukraine". Apparently, not all of the ministers interpreted the reference to "representation" in the same way. The difference was caused, primarily, by different "vectors" of the forces to which the statements were addressed. In April 1998, "the main ears" to hear the reassuring statement during the appointment of a pro-European Foreign Minister were the official Moscow. Nowadays the statement is addressed, first and foremost, to the West that becomes increasingly disillusioned by the pace of reform in Ukraine.

Another significant and rather symbolic factor in the context of Ukraine's relations with the West, in addition to the whole complex of failures and slowness in the pursuit of democratization and economic reform, was a letter to President Kuchma, signed recently by U.S. Ambassador Stephen Pifer, Canadian Ambassador Derek Freiser, head of the World Bank's Ukraine mission Gregory Jedrzejczak and the EBRD Ukraine office director Andrew Seton. The authors of the letter stated they were deeply concerned about President Kuchma's decision to discontinue the pursuit of the budget relations reform, proposed by the government's 2001 draft budget. They argued that the decision, alongside with other measures taken within a few recent weeks appeared to be a departure from the reform agenda adopted by the government and approved by the parliament (Ukraina Moloda, October 3, 2000). The document explicitly stated that any Western assistance in the future would be made conditional on the progress in development of support for the reform course.

Naturally, the President felt annoyed. "I do not know of any "other measures taken within a few recent weeks" to which the letter hints, and which would be able to impress its authors as a departure from the government's reform program," - Leonid Kuchma wrote in a response letter that was also sent by Prime Minister of Ukraine Victor Yushchenko.

The date on the letter to the President of Ukraine was September 20, 2000, but it was not until September 29 (on the eve of Tarasiuk's dismissal) when it was published by the pro-presidential Fakty i Komentarii. Yet, the exchange of letters would not convince the President to dismiss Tarasiuk; it would hardly even work as a trigger. Rather, it was an episode in a broader conflict that was finalized at this stage by the leadership reshuffle in the Foreign Ministry (that some major Russian media outlets had predicted for almost a year).

Borys Tarasiuk was the third top-ranking official to leave this government. The first "loss" of this Cabinet of Ministers was Minister of Economy Serhiy Tihipko who chose to run for parliament in the June 2000 by-election and won a seat. In mid-June, after a brief but intensive conflict with Vice Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, her immediate subordinate, Minister of Fuel and Energy Serhiy Tulub submitted his resignation "on his own free will". Borys Tarasiuk was dismissed from his position "due to the transfer to a different job", yet it is still unclear from the former minister will do. Although it is expected that he would resume diplomatic service as an ambassador, no formal confirmation of this version has been made yet.

Borys Tarasiuk's dismissal appeared to be a rather unpleasant surprise to the leadership of the Cabinet of Ministers. This conclusion can be made from the demonstratively reserved and dry comments on the event, made by Prime Minister Victor Yushchenko. According to the Prime Minister, the decision to dismiss Borys Tarasiuk from the position of the Minister of Foreign Affairs was made by President Leonid Kuchma, and the decision was "self-sufficient" for the government (Vechirniy Kyiv, October 5, 2000). In his turn, Victor Yushchenko commented positively about the ex-minister's activities as the head of the Foreign Ministry. "I believe he has done a great job, and throughout that period we cannot say that we have had any negative events in our diplomacy. However, how well that matched the increased foreign policy objectives, the higher "barrier" to be taken by the diplomatic corps, that's a different issue," he said.

"Different issues" are reflected rather well in a number of comments on Borys Tarasiuk's dismissal, made by some Ukrainian high-ranking officials. For instance, Speaker of the Ukrainian parliament Ivan Plushch explicitly linked the change in the leadership of the Foreign Ministry with the need to pursue a more flexible foreign policy (Ukrainian radio UR-1, October 2, 2000). However, the Speaker's statements to this end display a lack of logical consistency - a phenomenon that seems to be common for Ukraine's "multi-vector" foreign policy. While Ivan Plushch is strongly critical of Ukraine's stumbling on the way to the declared European integration policy, he also argues that a number of problems Ukraine is currently facing are directly linked to the "single-vector" foreign policy orientation. "One cannot pursue a single-vector West-oriented policy, because it is impossible nowadays. And if, as a result of the national economy building, we are unable to survive the winter without Russia, that policy should be pursued in the Western and the Eastern directions alike. Or, at least, it should be pursued in a way that would not cause and give reasons for suspicion," (UR-1, October 2, 2000).

The "suspicion" probably stands for the official Moscow's dissatisfaction with Borys Tarasiuk's method of pursuing "a Ukrainian style of multi-vector approach". However, in the context of the current economic realities, as President Leonid Kuchma argued, there is a need "to finally find a positive algorithm" in relations with the major north-eastern neighbor in order to aim it at mutually beneficial cooperation rather than confrontation (Uriadovyi Kurrier, October 4, 2000). Borys Tarasiuk, probably due to his pro-Western perspectives, was not inclined to persevere in the search for such an "algorithm".

Therefore, Borys Tarasiuk's resignation was caused primarily by the official Russia's irritation with Tarasiuk as the leader of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry. Commenting on this view, deputy chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs and Relations with the CIS Oleh Zarubinsky, MP, announced that "dismissal and appointment of a certain individual is always a result of actions and factors - those that are on the surface as well as those that are "under the table". <...> I know that the Russian authorities have exerted the pressure on the Ukrainian establishment demanding that Borys Tarasiuk be dismissed. The finale, i.e., the resignation itself was pushed ... by preparation to the winter [season]. The dependence on Russian energy sources dictates quite a few political decisions. I believe it was not done without some blackmail by certain Russian political actors..." (Vysoky Zamok, October 3, 2000). The argument may be indirectly enhanced by the fact that Borys Tarasiuk was dismissed shortly before the start of a new round of negotiations of Russian and Ukrainian expert groups on the gas debt issue. Furthermore, the Ukrainian leadership was more prepared for concessions in the light of Russia's intention to pull a new gas pipeline to Western Europe, bypassing Ukraine. The project that causes so much anxiety among the Ukrainian top officials may be implemented with the involvement of a number of European states that may consider economic feasibility higher than political risk of increasing dependence on a major energy source.

Hence, the time and the form of President Kuchma's decision was determined by the complex of economic and foreign policy factors and arguments that reflect the diminishing of Ukraine's political weight. However, it should be kept in mind that Anatoly Zlenko has never been seen as overtly pro-Russian politician, showing excessively "single-vector" orientation towards Ukraine's eastern neighbor. On the contrary, justifying his understanding of the Ukrainian-Russian relations as of nothing like the hierarchy of concessions in the context of the notorious "Slavic fraternity", in summer 2000, Anatoly Zlenko, then Ukraine's ambassador to France, argued that "deepening strategic cooperation with Russia, our largest neighbor state, with which we are linked by historic roots and economic cooperation interests, will depend on how deep are the mutual understanding and mutual respect for national interests" (Den, June 24, 2000). A number of commentators stress that Anatoly Zlenko's previous service was in France, the country that at the time was preparing to take the EU leadership. "We have great hopes in the EU's common strategy on Ukraine. By the way, Jaime Gama, Foreign Minister of Portugal that now leads the EU, has stated recently for the first time that Ukraine may come closer to the associated membership of the European Union once all provisions of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement are met," Zlenko told the Ukrainian press (Den, June 24, 2000). Although the statement can be mostly referred to the sphere of diplomatic good wishes, in this context the substitution of Tarasiuk with Zlenko in the circumstances of Ukraine's radical switch to the "Russian vector" looks like a rather lame effort to prove that the country's declared pro-European ambitions have remained unmodified. Similarly, the peculiar Ukrainian "Byzantism" can account for President Kuchma's recent trip to Turkmenistan (so far demonstratively ignored by most of the Russian official sources and the media). The trip resulted in securing an agreement at the top level about the supply of 30 billion cubic meters of Turkmenian natural gas to Ukraine in 2001-2002. The Russian gas-dealing leadership reacted by postponing its visit to Kyiv.

Given the recent developments, it is probably still premature to view Ukraine only as a buffer zone between Russia and the West on the "global chess-board". Ukraine is still seeking a proper place for itself, moving along the "multi-vector" labyrinth by the trial-and-error method.